*****Indispensable ****Worth buying ***Worth listening to **Boring *Junk

ALBUMS

Pic by Robert Ellis

GARY BARDEN and Michael Schenker, a riotous assembly

One night of slaughter

MSG
'One Night At Budokan'
(Chrysalis Japan WWS — 6715960)**

I PREDICT that if this short-fused, double barrelled dose of dynamite gets released out of the Land Of The Rising Yen and into the UK at a price harmonious with the depths of British pockets it shall bloweth all cobwebs off every dozing closet axe hero on these isles. Dust off thy imaginary guitars! Crank up your invisible Marshalls!

Throughout looney-land, possessed elbows and hands shall contort in the most weird, ridiculous postures of imitation imaginable, as thousands of over-awed, under-practised, would-be Schenkers marvel at the incredible string-twiddling therein.

The 'anguished grimace' style will show its ugly face once more, slobbering gob hanging open and eyes tightly closed. Watch out for the 'arch straddle', back bent a la Olga Korbut, legs apart and hair sweeping carpet. But beware those befuddled fingers in fits of incompetence of British Rail proportions, consuming and knotting themselves and anything else stupid enough to encroach their vicinity into painful, bandaged bundles. Oh, and remember headbanging can be ***and has been*** *suicidal!*

Contrary to legend, the Budokan is not a Chinese restaurant in Wandsworth. 'One Night' is, as you might expect, the legacy of MSG's Tokyo concert on last August's 'On The Rack' Jap tour. It seems surprisingly young in the life of a band to shovel out a double-live, and we can only assume one of two cases (or both) to be the reason.

It could be a posthumous, definitive memory of MSG Mk I (disregarding the first lp's session entourage), a glorified goodbye on the parts of Gary Barden and Paul Raymond. That would make doubly ironic the Raymond-crowd banter where he presents the three remaining members to the crowd, not bothering to bathe in the glory himself, and saying ***"I dunno where Gary's gone so I won't introduce him".***

Or else, it was voted necessary to excuse the strained, daft Nevison production of the second studio disc. On 'One Night' at times Chris Glen's grr-rumbling bass is sadly submerged, drowned in the mix. Otherwise it's a vast improvement. If you never grasped what logarithms were, try re-spelling that ***logger-rhythms*** *and listening to Cozy's off-beat time-keeping. This, Ron, is how they were* ***supposed*** *to sound!*

Whichever of the above respects was intended, the collection serves its purpose with a grand flourish. Side one opens with the swirling '633 Squadron' intro and a stunning cacophony as all instruments bear down on the listener like an anvil from an aeroplane. Bardens rally-calls ***"Hello Tokyo, MSG, armed and readeee",*** *and off we go into an apocalyptic jungle of top-hole corkers. By the time your quivering needle lifts after the rousing revelry of 'A and R' (with those racy lead injections between lines that the Lord of licks had honed to an art form on 'Obsession'), the howling lament of 'Cry For The Nations', and an 'Attack Of The Mad Axeman' that robs your senses and leaves your ears bleeding, you can only sympathise with the tiny object frantically following that gyrating groove as Schenkers' pinkies rub off the frets with more polish than a Rob Halford studded leotard and sleeker speed than an accelerating moonshot.*

'But I Want More', flipside of the tactic, shows what was one of the only shady symptoms, the lack of a second guitar while Paul Raymond's tuned to keyboards, an affliction which had (and has here) the exasperating habit of making MSG's magnum opus 'Lost Horizons' not the live classic it ought to be. An infectious 'Victim Of Illusion' and the precision of the chugging, growling, mechanical 'Into The Arena' instrumental (this take not quite as strong as the 12" version available) end the first record, which brings us to (you guessed it) side three. This side is the indisputable proof that no fault was with the songs on 'MSG'. 'On And On', 'Never Trust A Stranger' and 'Let Sleeping Dogs Lie' are there. On Raymond's brisk 'Stranger', the Elton John-esque ballad fades into a bluesy repartee between Chris Glen and Schenker, then bursts into a fiery torrential gust of wailing guitar, and frankly some of the playing on 'LSDL' makes (without mentioning names) whole ranks of professional HM-ist minstrels sound sloppy, uninventive, rudimentary and plain insignificant by comparison.

The last side starts with 'Courvoisier Concerto', a brief sci-fi-ish respite leaving only the ex-UFO duo pair in action, with Schenker letting rip over Raymond's eerie electric organ, before making the Flying 'V' grunt, scream with feedback, and squeeze out 'Lost Horizon's opening bars. 'Horizons' is to MSG what 'Rock Bottom' was to UFO, the climax of the Kraut's endeavours, before the final downhill boogie. A hearty customised 'Doctor Doctor' (new line ***"That's not a situation for a German boy"****) and singalonga 'Are You Ready To Rock' round off this set.*

Four stars is a generous award, though at £15.99 apiece in London the message ***isn't exactly buy it!*** *No way will Chrysalis UK release it officially, as it would in effect wipe out sales of the first two albums. But one hopes, unlikely as it may be as the line-up would be distorted, that it will eventually surface at a reasonable price, if only to avert the Whitesnake debacle being repeated. Take my word for it, it's a gem.*

PHILIP BELL

Fight 'til you drop

VARIOUS ARTISTS
'A Country Fit For Heroes'
(No Future Oi 3)**½**

EVEN AS the ink dries on our 'All Out Attack' article this vital compilation of grass roots punk thunders out to add fuel to the New Punk fire.

Technically an EP, it's long enough (12 tracks from 11 punk and skin bands for £2.25) and valuable enough to merit album-style discussion. But before we get into the meat and two veg of the review, it's worth answering some of the self-styled left-wing press's criticisms of this bludgeoning young movement.

They've already written it off as 'impotent' on the ridiculous ground that it won't 'smash capitalism'. A cynic might write them off for exactly the same reasons (the SWP apologise for the late arrival of the 1919/45/68/72 workers revolution) but that would be to miss the point that no-one is suggesting music can do anything of the sort.

What we are saying is that music like 'Country Fit For Heroes' is a hundred times more radical and relevant than the likes of Grace Jones and Scritti Politti who, for some obscure reason, are held in great awe by exactly the same dogmatic marxist rag, because it is contemporary folk music, young working class protest music, a (mostly) white equivalent of militant reggae, parallel to (and NOT antagonistic to) that (mostly) black form of protest. The modern blues.

From the squalor of the cover picture and the irony of the title to the blistering message of the music, this is an EP that reflects and rejects the appalling poverty and boredom of Unemployed/Rotten Job Britain. It's propaganda if you like, but propaganda based in the realities of life at the bottom, not in text book theorising. So it's naturally anti-Tory and pro-the-people. It's the voice of thousands but it knows it won't change anything without wider social/political struggles. It can only scream and shout, argue and agitate.

A blood-curdling cry introduces side one courtesy Blitzkrieg from dole-ridden Skelmersdale, who set the mood of the album with a cocksure guttersnipe toast to youth, 'The Future Belongs To Us'.

The vital Violators then belie the movement's unisound image with 'Die With Dignity' an insistent poppy pearl that finds the band sounding like a less pretentious Banshees. But just in case you think they're anything but hardcore, they steam back to basics with 'Government Stinks', Thatcher's smug voice giving way to a raging anti-Tory diatribe.

Nottingham's Hostile Youth follow that through logically with 'Fight Back', *"Disobey the rules/That's what they're there for/GOTTA FIGHT BACK"* the singer yells desperately while the band buzz about like an angry bee trapped in a bottle of ammonia.

This leads into the optimistic but enjoyable Subsy 'Government Downfall' from Malvern's own Samples and that's chased by the side-closing 'Jerusalem' from Lancashire's One Way System, sarky buggers who remind us that things ain't always what they should be *("The punks ain't punks, but they wear the right clothes/Opinions don't matter if you know how to pose")*.

Attack, who are hot on the heels of their New Mills contemporaries, Blitz and the Violators, kick off Side Two with 'Blue Patrol', a rumbling atmospheric treatise on police harassment of street youth. Next Manchester's Protest take up the gauntlet with 'Orders', a sprightly, tough and uptempo pleas for listeners to disobey same.

Just in case you think this is all getting too political (small p), Nuneaton's skin heroes Crux come next with an A1 bootboy bravado anthem. *"CLA Skinheads always in the right/Drinking thru the day and ——ing thru the night"* they chant with terrace style glee, adding in case you hadn't guessed *"We don't give a shit what the higher class think — CLA, CLA, CLA — OK!"*

And that leaves the album to finish in strictly grass roots style with the manic pogorama of 'Action Man' from Cumbria's Distortion, the Partisansy protest of fellow Welshmen the Pseudo-Sadists and their 'Power Schemes', and finally some CND observations spikey herbert style in 'Whose Bomb?' from Scotland's own Chaotic Youth.

Sure this collection is rough-arsed, foul-mouthed and not produced anywhere near as well as the last ELO album, but this is genuine street music, it's representative of a real and growing movement that's too cocky to ever become defeatist, and too proud to accept Thatcher's Britain without a fight.

The Movement and the album are about Reality, and Reality Punk is showing all the signs of being an idea whose time has come.

GARRY BUSHELL

GARY of Attack, the copper's friend

Way off centre

CENTRAL LINE
'Central Line'
(Mercury SRM-1-4033)**

FOR CENTRAL Line, at least, the Brit Funk explosion seems to have been less of a bang and more of a belch.

As with Linx — and, to a lesser extent, the Begger And Co collective — their disco dance atmosphere hasn't translated onto albums with much of an impact, the entire original British spark buried beneath US-slick production.

'Central Line' is, undoubtedly, the dullest example of this dubious smoothing out process. Flat and insipid, it languishes on the turntable with all the power and attack of a toothless tiger riding a mangled moped. It is hugely tedious.

While I expected ballads such as 'Goodbye' to be riddled with the Diana Ross/Lionel Ritchie pall of blandness — this is what they *want* to smootch to in the discos — it was roundly disappointing to find the more, ahem, 'up-tempo' numbers similarly stilted. Even 'Walking Into Sunshine', would you believe?

To be honest, Spandau Ballet's dinky funkery is a good deal more convincing than this lethargic nonsense. Heaven 17 piss all over it. Though neither possess the stunning ability of Central Line, each at least use what they have to a determined original end. Central Line just toe the traditional (central) line. And to think their drummer plays for Samson.

ROBBI MILLAR